

5. Sensory Disabilities

Vision Impairment



Vision loss is any reduction in the ability to see, including blurred vision, cloudy vision, double vision, blind spots, poor night vision, and loss of peripheral vision (tunnel vision). Vision loss may affect one or both eyes, it may occur gradually or suddenly, and it may be partial or complete. Vision changes may originate in the eyes themselves or may be caused by many different conditions that affect the brain or even the whole body.

Participant leaders need to be constantly aware of the degree of vision impairment of a participant and consider this when developing a program and involving them in activities. Be aware that the length of time of sight impairment will often determine the comfort factor with trying new or challenging sport and active recreation activities.

In communicating with a participant who has vision impairment:

- Speak directly to them, not through a third person;
- Address them by name;
- Identify yourself and introduce them to other people;
- Tell them when you're leaving so that they are not left talking to themselves;
- Speak in the normal speaking volume: people with vision impairment usually have normal hearing;
- Where possible, eliminate any background noise so that instructions can be heard.

In assisting a participant who is visually impaired it is important to be articulate and to give the fullest description of instructions; this may involve moving parts of their body to indicate a required movement for an activity.

It is important that you discuss with the participant the need to assist through touch before actually touching them. Familiarise them with an area and obstacles that may exist let them feel the area and give them time to explore.

Give the participant constant verbal feedback so that they know whether or not an action is being done correctly.

Vision Impairment

Programming Considerations

- Be aware of each individual's capabilities.
- Ask what support is required - do not assume without asking.
- Think about what other tasks individuals could also assist with in an activity, if they cannot actively participate.
- Be aware of what type of modified or supportive equipment is available.
- Programming areas will need to be cleared of obstacles.

Strategies for Inclusion

- Get other participants to provide assistance if appropriate.
- Make sure to provide an orientation to the program area.
- Verbal cues and guiding will be required but ask first.
- Provide 1:1 support if necessary.

Sensory Disabilities

Hearing Impairment



People with hearing impairment will in most circumstances have participated in or are currently participating in education programs that have enabled them to develop skills and to understand their capabilities. A person with a hearing impairment may not consider deafness to be a disability. Appropriate support is important to enable a person with hearing impairment to participate fully.

There are four types of hearing loss:

Conductive hearing loss can be acquired or congenital and is caused by blockage or damage in the outer or middle ear. This will result in loss of loudness and can usually be helped by medical or surgical treatment.

Sensorineural hearing loss can be acquired or congenital and is caused by damage to, or malfunction of, the cochlea (sensory part) or the hearing nerve (neural part). This leads to a loss of loudness as well as a lack of clarity. The quantity and the quality of sound are affected and sometimes may limit the benefit of a hearing aid.

Mixed hearing loss results when there is a problem in both the conductive pathway (in the outer or middle ear) and in the nerve pathway (the inner ear). An example of a mixed hearing loss is a conductive loss due to a middle-ear infection combined with a sensorineural loss due to damage associated with ageing.

Hearing impairments can occur in only one ear or both and can range from slight to profound, depending on how well a person can hear the intensities or frequencies most usually associated with speech.

The communication skills of people with hearing impairments vary greatly. Many use sign language but the level of ability can vary greatly and it also depends on the ability of the receiver to understand the communication. Find out from the participant and the parents/caregivers the most preferred means of communication.

Hearing Impairment

Programming Considerations

- Be sure the participant has understood all rules, instructions, safety procedures when participating in activities.
- Buddy up with another participant if necessary.
- One leader may have to be trained in sign language if required.
- The parents or caregivers may have a communication book that leaders could use.
- Ensure full eye contact when giving instructions.

Strategies for Inclusion

- Be aware of how a person communicates so you can plan their involvement to maximise their ability to participate and contribute.
- Depending on the communication methods of the individual involved, you may consider including a leader who can use sign language as part of your leadership team.

Behaviour Management Issues

- Individuals may become frustrated if they are unable to communicate effectively.